

SUPPORTING CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL FOR IRAN HOSTAGES

(Mr. SUOZZI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SUOZZI. Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the award of a Congressional Gold Medal to the 52 hostages of the Iran hostage crisis that were released, after 444 days of captivity, 41 years ago today.

On November 4, 1979, Iranian student militants stormed the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took Embassy employees captive. Despite mock firing squads, beatings, solitary confinement, lack of food, and psychological torture, the American hostages maintained their strength and resilience.

Back at home, Americans remained united in their support for the hostages, many tying yellow ribbons around trees as a sign of solidarity. The former hostages have never received proper recognition from their government for their sacrifices.

This bipartisan bill is a symbol of our Nation's ability to come together to honor these American heroes. As of today, the bill has over 166 cosponsors.

Special thanks to Commission 52 and Chairman Brock Pierce for helping to gather support for the bill. It is a true public service.

PRESIDENT BIDEN DRAGGING COUNTRY BACKWARD

(Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this week marks 1 year of President Biden's out-of-touch, reckless, and disastrous Presidency.

The past 12 months have been filled with failure after failure, and Americans are dealing with the consequences at every corner.

From skyrocketing inflation, increased crime rates, a disastrous Afghanistan exit, an open border agenda, concerned parents labeled as domestic terrorists, and more, this administration has failed the American people.

Amidst all the crises, President Biden has spent a quarter of his first year in his Delaware basement, avoiding all responsibilities. This is unacceptable from anyone.

I came to Congress to serve the people of Texas' 25th Congressional District, and when I am back home, I hear firsthand how Texans are worse off under President Biden than ever before.

The bottom line is, a year of the Biden administration's socialist and far-left agenda has dragged our country backward, not forward.

It is time America has leaders that put America first. President Joe Biden is not that leader. He has 33 percent approval.

In God we trust.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STANTON). Members are reminded to re-

frain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

CELEBRATING FEDERAL FUNDING TO EXPAND HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL

(Ms. GARCIA of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. GARCIA of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the Federal dollars coming to the Houston area to solve the supply chain issues facing our community and to create more jobs.

Yesterday, the Biden administration announced over \$14 billion for projects that will improve our Nation's ports, waterways, and railroads. That includes \$147 million for a project to expand the Houston Ship Channel on the way to the Port of Houston.

This project will make it easier for ships to reach the docks and help more cargo move faster from the container ship to the store shelf. This will create jobs, jobs, and more jobs. This is huge for Texas, huge for Houston, and huge for the whole country.

Thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by this Chamber, we are solving the real problems facing everyday Americans.

I am grateful for the leadership of President Biden and my colleagues in Congress for getting this done.

REPUBLICANS WILLING TO WORK WITH PRESIDENT BIDEN

(Mr. GROTHMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, I listened last night to President Biden's press conference, and I was disappointed that he felt the Republicans did not want to work with him.

I would like to open the door, first of all, to working together to balance the budget. We don't consider it a goal of ours to race to get to \$30 trillion in debt.

Please, Mr. Biden, convene a group of Republicans and Democrats. Let's work together to balance the budget.

Secondly, prior to you taking office, it was routine that about 20,000 people per month came across the border. Now, we are at over 80,000.

I secondly ask that we convene a bipartisan group to get back down to 20,000 a month to cross the border.

Finally, at the time President Trump was President, he was given a cocktail which cured his COVID illness almost immediately. That cocktail should be available to all Americans.

I, again, encourage a joint conference with us to get together and cure the people who get COVID.

Finally, Mr. President, stop being so divisive and screaming racism right and left. It does no good for this body to constantly call racism.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair.

IMPROVING MERRILL AND RING CREEK BRIDGE

(Mr. LARSEN of Washington asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. LARSEN of Washington. Mr. Speaker, people have been traveling across the Merrill and Ring Creek Bridge in Everett, Washington, since Herbert Hoover was President of the United States.

Every day, residents drive, walk, pedal, and roll across the bridge to get to and from work and school in Everett and to catch a ferry in Mukilteo. Commuters on Everett Transit's route 18 bus rely on the bridge to access Sounder commuter rail and Amtrak service at Everett Station.

However, a recent assessment revealed the bridge is not only structurally deficient; it is vulnerable to collapse in the event of an earthquake. Thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law, Washington communities will receive more than \$605 million over the next 5 years to invest in critical bridge repairs.

Last week, Everett officials took me across the Merrill and Ring Creek Bridge and told me how this bold, long-term investment will create jobs, drive economic recovery, and keep people on the move.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot have a big-league economy with little-league infrastructure. Thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law, communities in my district now have the resources needed to repair aging bridges and build a winning game plan for the region's economic future.

RECOGNIZING STETSON BENNETT

(Mr. CARTER of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and recognize one of the First District's finest, quarterback Stetson Bennett of the Georgia Bulldogs.

Football is filled with stories of triumph, tribulation, and heart. The saga of Stetson Bennett has now cemented itself as one of those great stories that football fans will talk about for generations.

Hailing from Blackshear, Georgia, in Pierce County, Stetson Bennett grew up with a dream and a drive to turn that dream into reality.

As a young quarterback at Pierce County High School, Stetson was able to accumulate 3,700 passing yards, 500 rushing yards, and 40 touchdowns, along with Class 3A second team all-State honors.

Despite his accomplishments, Stetson was overlooked by many top football programs, but he never gave up the dream and walked on at the University of Georgia.

Following his freshman year, he chose to transfer to a junior college,

where he went 10–2 and won a championship. He returned to the University of Georgia his junior year and earned a starting role.

This past season, Stetson Bennett spearheaded the Dawgs to their first college football national championship in 42 years. The dream has become reality.

Stetson inspires me and will inspire others for many years to come.

Congratulations, and go Dawgs.

HONORING THE LIFE OF OFFICER BOBBY REED

(Mr. CORREA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, today, we honor the life and memory of Officer Bobby Reed.

He was born November 23, 1951, and Bobby Reed's life was about service to his community and to his country.

As a marine, he was deployed overseas to Vietnam, where he served honorably and attained the rank of staff sergeant.

When he returned home to Santa Ana, California, my hometown, he decided to join the local police department to continue protecting and serving his community.

During his 28 years of service on the Santa Ana police force, Officer Reed was honored many times over by his colleagues and his community for his exemplary service and character. Multiple civic organizations, such as Kiwanis and MADD, recognized him with many awards.

He was also elected as a board member of the Santa Ana Police Officers Association, showing, again, his leadership and his positive influence on others.

As we celebrate Bobby's life, may his example continue to shine for the next generation.

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SPEAKER PHELAN SETS THE BAR HIGH

(Mr. WEBER of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WEBER of Texas. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize the 76th Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, Representative Dade Phelan of Beaumont, Texas.

Speaker Phelan, who is serving his fourth term representing the great District 21, is one of the most conservative Speakers in our State's history and has made it his priority to significantly improve the lives of Texans every single day.

As only the fourth Republican to hold the Texas House Speakership since 1871, or 151 years, he has set the bar high for any who might follow in his footsteps. He fought to pass landmark legislation that protects businesses, taxpayers, the unborn, religious

freedoms, and our Second Amendment rights.

Under his leadership, the Texas House led on criminal justice reform issues, healthcare affordability, police funding, and addressing winter storm Uri's long-term impact on our State.

I cannot express how proud we are in Texas 14 to claim Speaker Phelan, his wife Kim, and their four precious boys, Ford, Mack, Hank, and little Luke, as our own.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Speaker Phelan for all he does for Texas.

ENSURING VETERANS' SMOOTH TRANSITION ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 860, I call up the bill (H.R. 4673) to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for the automatic enrollment of eligible veterans in patient enrollment system of Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 860, an amendment in the nature of a substitute consisting of the text of Rules Committee Print 117–26 is adopted, and the bill, as amended, is considered read.

The text of the bill, as amended, is as follows:

H.R. 4673

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Ensuring Veterans' Smooth Transition Act" or the "EVEST Act".

SEC. 2. AUTOMATIC ENROLLMENT OF ELIGIBLE VETERANS IN PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—Section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(d)(1) *The Secretary shall enroll each veteran described in subsection (a) in the patient enrollment system under this section by not later than 60 days after receiving the information described in paragraph (3) with respect to the veteran.*

“(2) *Not later than 60 days after enrolling a veteran under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall provide to the veteran—*

“(A) *notice of the veteran's enrollment; and*

“(B) *instructions for how the veteran may opt out of such enrollment, at the election of the veteran.*

“(3) *The information described in this paragraph is the appropriate information concerning eligibility for enrollment in the patient enrollment system under this section, as provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center of the Department of Defense, or such successor entity of the Department.*”.

(b) *APPLICABILITY.*—Subsection (d) of section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply to a veteran with respect to whom the Secretary receives the information described in paragraph (3) of such subsection on or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(c) *ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATES OF ELIGIBILITY FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM.*—Not later than August 1, 2022, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

shall ensure that any veteran who is eligible for automatic enrollment in the patient enrollment system under subsection (d) of section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), is able to access—

(1) *an electronic version of the certificate of eligibility showing the veteran's eligibility for such enrollment; and*

(2) *an electronic mechanism by which the veteran may opt out of such enrollment.*

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The bill, as amended, is debatable for 1 hour equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs or their respective designees.

The gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 4673, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4673, as amended, my bill, the Ensuring Veterans' Smooth Transition, or EVEST Act.

I have made suicide prevention a top priority for the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. Last Congress, we passed bipartisan, bicameral mental health legislative packages, including the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Improvement Act and the Veterans COMPACT Act. This Congress, we continued this work by passing the Sergeant Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act into law, but there is always more to do.

EVEST builds on our work and finally closes one of the most glaring gaps for veterans being able to successfully access high-quality VA health services, the enrollment process. We shouldn't be trying to hide VA care from those who earned it.

We know that the months following transition out of the military can be very stressful and particularly risky for new veterans in terms of mental health. With the EVEST Act, service-members will be automatically enrolled in VA care during their transition out of the military, with the choice to opt out. This helps simplify the process and prevents veterans from potentially missing out on lifesaving care. It also keeps veterans from having to opt into VA care later and attempt to navigate a new bureaucracy all on their own.

The symptoms of PTSD can be significantly improved in veterans who receive prompt mental healthcare. A 2014 study led by researchers at the San Francisco VA Medical Center looked at nearly 40,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who received VA mental